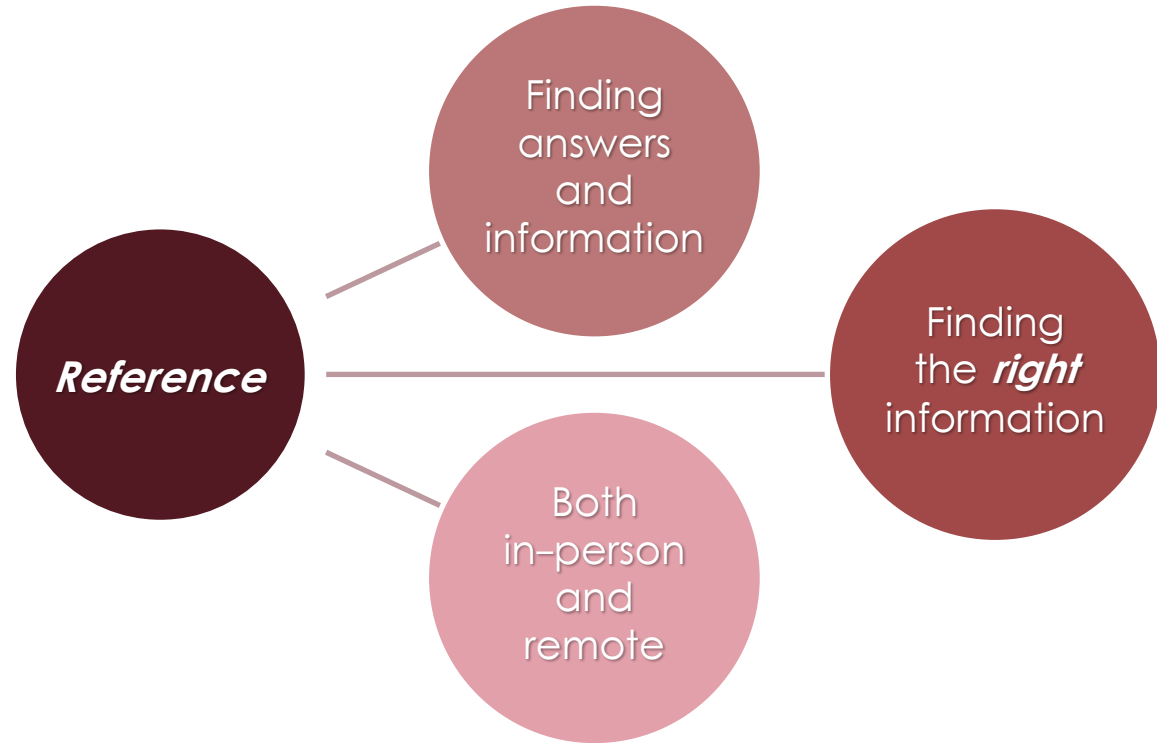


# *Reference Basics*

**Alex Brower** | Information Services Director

# *What is Reference?*



# *Privacy*

“In a library (physical or virtual), the right to privacy is the right to open inquiry without having the subject of one’s interest examined or scrutinized by others.”

-- American Library Association

Libraries are there to facilitate,  
**not monitor**, access to information.

# *Virtual Reference*

- ▶ **Helpful in a pandemic *and* regular times**
- ▶ **Opens the library to a wider community**
- ▶ **Great tool for ready reference services**  
(because people hate phone calls!)
- ▶ **Easy to integrate into existing services**
  - ▶ Text reference
  - ▶ Shared email (if multiple staff)
  - ▶ Live chat services

# *Types of Reference Questions*

## **Library Specific**

- When is storytime?
- How do I get a library card?

## **Ready Reference**

- What is the phone number for the American Printing House for the Blind?
- Who is my Congressperson?

## **Research Questions**

- Could you help me trace my family tree? My grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. F. Carson from Possumneck.
- I'm writing a paper and I need scholarly sources about tragic romance in literature.

# *Medical and Legal Questions*

**Do not attempt to interpret information.  
You are not a doctor or a lawyer.**

**Does your library have a policy?**

## **MLC's legal statement:**

“Please note that I am not a lawyer. All information I have enclosed is simply for your informational use. I cannot give legal advice; I can only provide information from sources available to me through the state government and the Mississippi Library Commission.

Please let me know if you have further questions. Thank you for using the Mississippi Library Commission as a source of information.”

# *Reference Interview*

## **Establishing**

Establish rapport with the patron. Look approachable!  
Ask if people need help.

## **Negotiating**

Ask open-ended questions, but don't explicitly ask why they need that information. Paraphrase the question.

## **Developing**

Develop a search strategy and communicate it to the patron. Use "we" language. Which sources would be best?

## **Locating**

Locate and evaluate information. Check and make sure that what you have is what your patron needs.

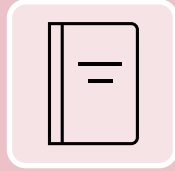
## **Ensuring**

Ensure that your patron's question is fully answered.

## **Closing**

Close the interview without making the patron feel dismissed. Invite them to come again!

# *Types of Sources*



## **Books/Print**

Best for deeper dives or historical information.



## **Databases**

Best for scholarly articles and specialized information (e.g.: MAGNOLIA.)



## **Internet/Digital**

Best for quick facts, news, pop culture, and government publications.



# *Databases*

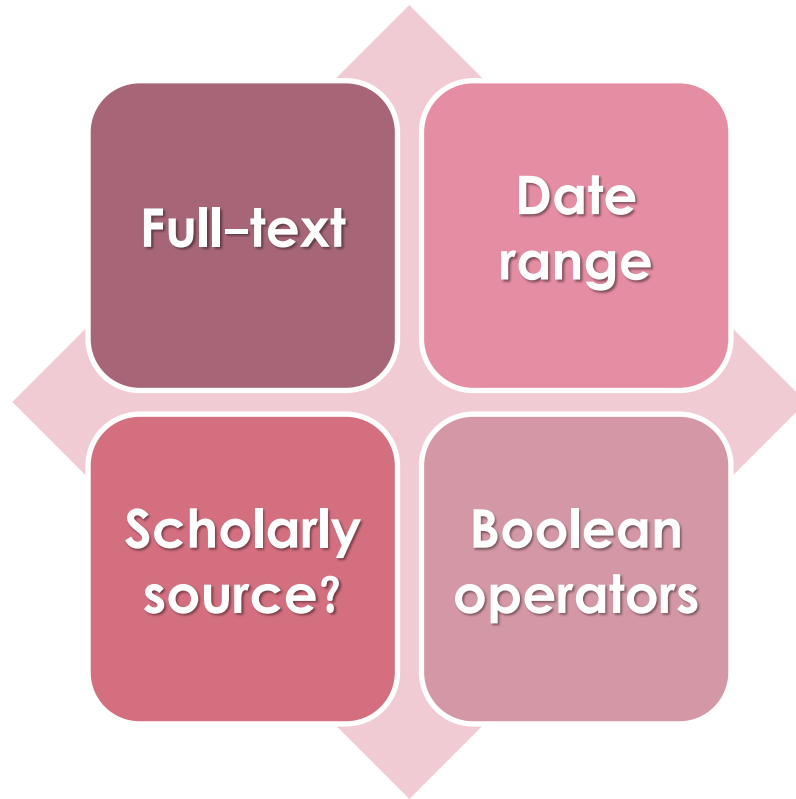
Online and subscription databases

Digitized reference materials

Broad or narrow focus

Helpful for current topics that may not be published in books (ex. new medical treatments)

# *Database Searching*



# Boolean Operators

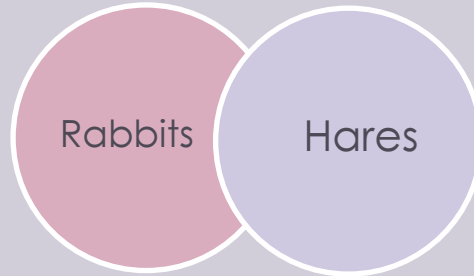
**AND:** All the given terms must be found, narrows a search.

Witches AND Wizards



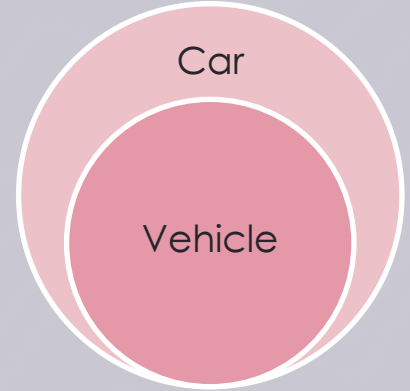
**NOT:** Eliminates all terms that follow it; narrows a search. Useful when you need a specific aspect of a topic.

Rabbits NOT Hares



**OR:** Searches any of the terms connected to it; broadens search. Helpful if searching for synonyms.

Car OR Vehicle



# *MLC's Subscription Databases*

## Demographics Now

Business database containing detailed demographics estimates, consumer expenditures, and retail sales information customizable by state, county, city, zip. Can be used to gather information for business or grant-seeking purposes.

## Heritage Quest

Genealogical database (similar to Ancestry) that contains not only census information, but also articles from historical journals and information from the Freedman's Bank.

## Novelist Plus

The complete readers' advisory solution, empowers librarians, engages readers and connects communities. This database is a readers' advisory tool for both fiction and nonfiction titles.

## Sanborn Maps

Digital versions of historical fire insurance maps.

# *Types of Internet Sources*

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Government information

---

Ready reference

---

Genealogical sites

---

Online databases

---

List from ALA (double check that they work)

# *Searching the Internet*

- ▶ **Which search engine should you use?**
  - ▶ **General search engine:** Google, Yahoo
  - ▶ **Academic search engine:** Google Scholar
- ▶ **Start with blanket terms and narrow down.**
- ▶ **Think about alternate spellings.**
- ▶ **Give context!**
  - ▶ Ex. If you're looking for information about Prince, search "Prince AND artist" or even "artist formally known as Prince"
- ▶ **Try using Boolean operators.**

# *Evaluating Internet Sources*

Was the website linked from a trusted source?

Untrustworthy until proven authoritative

Is the author known in their field?

If it looks sketchy, it's probably sketchy. Go with your gut!

Typos?

Does a known organization sponsor or run the site?

Currency of website or copyright date



# *Tidbits & Gems*



## *Secrets to “Ref-celence”*

**Practice!**

**Create  
templates  
for remote  
requests  
(chat, text,  
email, etc.)**

**Look up  
weird stuff  
you’re into.**

**Create  
finding aids  
or resource lists  
for common  
questions**

**Talk to your  
coworkers  
when finding  
an answer.**

**Practice  
more!**

*Still Can't  
Find an  
Answer?*

**Forward us your weirdos!**



**MLC Reference Desk**

- ▶ **Phone:** 601-432-4492 *or* 1-877-594-5733
- ▶ **Text:** 601-208-0868
- ▶ **Email:** [mlcref@mlc.lib.ms.us](mailto:mlcref@mlc.lib.ms.us)

## *Activity*

Use the following link to complete a choose-your-own adventure type reference request:

<https://www.inklewriter.com/stories/77649>

Once each group has completed their stories, discuss the results and why you made the choices you did. Do you feel more familiar with the reference interview process?

# *Projects*

1

List of resources available  
in the community

2

List of answers and sources  
for frequently asked questions

3

Instructions on databases  
your library has

*Any questions?*



**Alex Brower | Information Services Director**

**601-432-4117**

**[abrower@mlc.lib.ms.us](mailto:abrower@mlc.lib.ms.us)**